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Personal Touches Early in the Year - Classroom Design Photo Essay Series

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Early in the year, many of the walls in our classroom are bare, as we wait to fill them up with our learning - our new words, books we've read together, literacy goals, math graphs, anchor charts.

Yet our goal is still that our students can quickly see their place in this community. We want the classroom to feel like home to them, with those personal touches that connect home to school, and students to each other. Here are four quick art/design projects you can complete in the first weeks of school that personalize the classroom for students.

Face/Name Magnets

Students create these during the first days of school, and then use them every day on our graph to chart their preferences in different tallies. For example, students might place their magnets on the Daily Graph noting their favorite chapter or picture book. Our questions of the day on the Daily Graph early in the year include:

- How did you get to school today?



- How many people in your family?
- What is your favorite ice cream flavor?
- What month is your birthday?

Once children have seen a variety of questions, the helpers of the day begin to take over creating questions for the daily graph.

These magnets are easy to complete - all you need is Shrinky Dink paper, available at your local craft store or from the on-line link below. We cut each 8x10 sheet of this special paper into quarters and then trace a simple head and shoulders pattern on each quarter sheet for every child. Children then use colored pencils to decorate their head and add their name to the "chest area." We cut out and bake the shapes as explained in the directions on the Shrinky Dink package, and then glue an extra strong magnet on the back. They work great on most white boards and file cabinets!

You can order Shrinky Dink paper at this link:

<http://www.shrinkydinks.com/>



Black Framed Student Art

We stock up on black frames from the dollar store - the different sizes make this display far more visually interesting than buying a standard size for every student. Because the artwork is tacked on the outside of the glass, not the inside, it is easy to change out the student's art whenever they complete a new picture they are especially proud of. Children love pointing out their art to visitors or classmates.



Self-Portraits

These face portraits are a special project early in the year. We turn the corners of the construction paper frames for more texture and a professional look.



Framed Photos

We ask each child to bring in a favorite photo from home, and these photos often include their family members. There is an occasional child who doesn't bring in a photo (it could be one is unavailable, given the transient lives of some of our students). In those cases, we will snap a photo on the playground and frame it. We use various frames from the dollar store in many different styles, and these are scattered all around the room on bookshelves, display areas, or near the storage bins.



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